

By What Authority?

The Argument in Twenty Minutes

A Self-Contained Introduction to By What Authority

By What Authority? — The Argument in Twenty Minutes

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This document stands alone. It is a complete statement of the case. Everything it claims can be verified. The full evidence is in the volumes listed at the end — all of them free.

Something doesn't fit

If you have read the Bible — or been in a church, or heard the tradition described — you may have felt a specific discomfort that nobody names directly.

The tradition contains two Gods.

One operates through law, covenant, and conditional retribution. Obey and be blessed. Disobey and suffer. He commands the destruction of entire cities. He makes a wager in his own court over a righteous man's suffering. His relationship with his people is conditional: an account is always open, and the balance matters.

The other tells his hearers to love enemies. His Father makes the sun rise on evil and good alike and sends rain on the just and the unjust. The reach comes before any reckoning. The offer is made before any account has been opened. These are not the same being having good days and bad days. The contradiction is structural. And for most people who have felt it and been told not to worry — that God develops over time, that the New Testament fulfils the Old in ways that resolve the tension — the explanations have never quite worked. The tension is real. It was named before.

Two passages from the same letter

Both of these are in Paul's letter to the Romans. Both have been in every manuscript for seventeen centuries. The question is whether they should be read as the same person.

Romans 8:31–39

“What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from God's love.”

Romans 13:1–2

“Let every soul be in subjection to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. Therefore he who resists the authority, withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment.”

The first Paul has no use for governing authorities. His argument moves toward the claim that nothing in the created order — no power or principality — touches the relationship he is describing. The second makes submission to governing authorities a divine command carrying the threat of divine judgment for resistance.

These can be read as the same person. The question is whether they should be, once the manuscript evidence has been followed where it leads.

We know texts were changed

Before any argument about Paul specifically, there is a prior question: did ancient scribes add material to the New Testament texts?

Yes. This is not disputed by any serious scholar. The evidence is in the manuscripts themselves, and most modern Bible translations note specific cases in their footnotes.

The longer ending of Mark. Mark's gospel ends at verse 8: "They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Every major Bible translation notes that the verses which follow — resurrection appearances, the commission to the disciples, miraculous signs — are absent from the oldest manuscripts. Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, the two earliest near-complete Greek New Testaments (fourth century), end Mark at verse 8. The longer ending is a second-century addition. The overwhelming consensus of scholarship across denominations agrees.

The woman caught in adultery. "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone." One of the most beloved passages in the gospels. Absent from the oldest Greek manuscripts. When it appears in later manuscripts, it moves — some place it in John, some in Luke. A passage that floats around the tradition rather than sitting in one fixed location is almost certainly a later insertion. Virtually all textual scholars across the entire tradition agree.

The Heavenly Witnesses. 1 John 5:7 is the most explicit Trinitarian statement in the New Testament: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." Absent from every Greek manuscript before the sixteenth century. A late insertion, omitted from every modern critical edition.

Three cases. Three different books. All now acknowledged by the overwhelming consensus of scholarship. What they share: the material is absent from the oldest sources; removing it leaves the surrounding text complete and

coherent; the addition serves a specific identifiable need of the period in which it appears; where writing style can be tested, it differs from its context. What this establishes: the presence of a passage in the manuscript tradition cannot by itself prove it was in the original letter. Presence means transmission. It does not mean origin.

The pattern in Paul

The argument applied to Paul's letters is stronger than "some things were added." It is an argument about direction.

Paul's seven authenticated letters were written in the 50s CE — before any of the gospels, twenty to forty years before the earliest gospel was composed. When the same tests are applied systematically to Paul, specific passages are flagged by multiple independent methods simultaneously: they disrupt the surrounding argument structurally; the writing style shifts; they are absent from the earliest known collection of Paul's letters; they are first cited in documents produced by the party with the clearest institutional interest in them; they serve institutional needs that did not exist when Paul was writing. The passages that light up under all these tests include:

- **Romans 13:1–7** — submit to governing authorities; all authority is instituted by God
- **1 Corinthians 14:34–35** — women should be silent in the churches
- **1 Thessalonians 2:14–16** — the passage used historically to license hostility toward Jewish people
- **Romans 9–11** — the covenant-continuity section reasserting Israel's special status under the Hebrew covenant
- **2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1** — do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers
- The household codes in Ephesians and Colossians — wives submit to husbands, slaves obey masters

These are the passages that produce the most discomfort for any serious reader. They are also the passages the methodology most consistently identifies as later additions. That convergence is not confirmation bias. The method does not begin by asking "which passages would I prefer not to be original?" It applies the same tests to every passage and records where they cluster. They cluster here.

And — this is the argument's critical feature — **every single identified addition moves in the same direction.** They all tighten Paul's relationship to the Hebrew covenant, to institutional authority, to established hierarchy, to conditional belonging. Not one identified addition moves the other way. Not one makes Paul more radical, more grace-oriented, more anti-institutional. Random copying errors scatter in all directions. A consistent direction indicates purpose.

Who Marcion was, and why the dating matters

Marcion of Sinope arrived in Rome around 140 CE. He was a wealthy ship-owner from the Black Sea coast, theologically serious, and he felt the two-God tension acutely enough that he named it and built a theological position on it. The institutional church expelled him in 144 CE.

What matters here is what he left behind. Marcion assembled Paul's letters into the first known collection — before any church council, before any official canon. His collection is the earliest documentary witness to what Paul's letters contained at mid-second century.

The pro-institutional writers who responded to Marcion — Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen — are the first people to cite, at length, the specific passages that later made Paul so useful to governing institutions. Romans 13:1–7 appears in Irenaeus defending Roman imperial authority. The women-silence passage appears in Tertullian arguing for women's subordination. Romans 9–11 appears in Origen arguing against Marcion's two-God position.

These passages are absent from the collection of Paul's letters that existed before the institutional response to Marcion. They are first cited by the institutional response to Marcion. The timing is not coincidental. It is, on this argument, the mechanism.

The downstream chain

What was done with the edited Paul matters because the edited Paul did not stay in a church. It entered law.

From Paul to papal authority. The passage “all authority comes from God” provided the scriptural foundation for the doctrine of divinely instituted political authority, cited continuously from the second century onward. In the medieval period it became the warrant for the church’s claim to act as the source and arbiter of legitimate political power.

From papal authority to the bulls. That claim generated *Romanus Pontifex* (Nicholas V, 1455), addressed to King Alfonso V of Portugal. The operative language: the pope grants “full and free faculty... to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever... and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery.” The grant was made in the name of God, on the authority of the Holy See. *Inter Caetera* (Alexander VI, 1493) extended the same authority to Spain over the Americas: “We do give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castille and Leon, forever... all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered.”

From the bulls to constitutional law. *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823) incorporated the Doctrine of Discovery into American common law. Chief Justice Marshall held that European “discovery” of a territory conferred on the discovering Christian nation the exclusive right to extinguish native title. In Australia, the same doctrine operated through the royal prerogative. *Mabo v. Queensland (No. 2)* (1992) recognised native title but explicitly affirmed Crown sovereignty and declined to examine how that sovereignty was acquired.

From the law to the oath architecture. Every public official, every military officer, every judge swearing personal allegiance to the Crown holds the downstream structure in place through personal commitment, generation after generation, without the foundational question being asked.

The chain runs from a passage in Paul's letters to the constitutional order of settler colonies. Each link is a primary source document. Each can be read.

The concession already made

The institution has acknowledged the moral argument while declining to move the legal structure.

In March 2023, the Vatican issued a joint statement explicitly repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery: “The Catholic Church therefore repudiates those concepts that fail to recognise the inherent human rights of indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political ‘doctrine of discovery.’”

The institution repudiated its own foundational documents. It did not restore the land. It did not void the title. The legal instruments it acknowledged as morally defective continue to be cited in constitutional courts.

Mabo (1992) is the legal equivalent. The High Court of Australia, in finding for native title, made an admission the system has not fully processed: the foundational question of how the Crown acquired sovereignty over inhabited territories without treaty or consent was, in the court’s words, not justiciable. The foundation cannot be examined from within the system built on it.

That is not a resolution. It is an acknowledgment that the question exists and cannot be answered inside the structure designed to avoid it.

By what authority

The question this series asks is not primarily theological and not primarily legal. It is evidentiary.

The passage that told two thousand years of Christians that governing authority is divinely instituted — the passage that made submission to sovereign power a religious obligation — is not, on the analysis developed here, what Paul wrote. The passage that authorised the church to grant sovereignty over non-Christian peoples to Christian crowns rests, at its theological root, on a text whose provenance is seriously contested.

A structure built on an unexamined foundational warrant is not the same as one built on demonstrated authority, even if both look identical from outside. The difference does not void the law today. It changes the character of the claim. An institution that says “submit because God ordained it” is making an apostolic claim. If the passage behind that claim was inserted into Paul’s letters by people who needed it there, the claim is structurally different from what it presents itself as.

By what authority did this foundation arise?

The chain this series traces answers the historical form of that question: by a warrant that was assembled, not inherited. What is not settled by this series is the forward question — by what authority should things be governed going forward, and what follows from the finding for those with standing and institutional responsibility. That question this series opens. It does not resolve it.

Everything is free

This document and the full series are free. No paywall. No credential requirement. No institutional filter between the argument and the people it most directly concerns.

That is not a publishing strategy. The tradition this series examines secured its authority in part by controlling who could read the texts and what they were supposed to mean — Latin only, authorised interpreters, laypeople formally excluded from direct reading. This series does the opposite, because the argument requires it. If what the authentic Paul argues is that grace does not wait for qualification or merit, then access to the evidence for that argument cannot be gatekept by the class of institutions that benefited from suppressing it.

The methodology is documented. The dataset is public. The signal weights and confidence calculations are in Companion A. The counter-cases and the strongest objections are in Appendix H of Volume 3. If the argument is wrong, the tools to demonstrate that are already in your hands.

Where to go from here:

- *Volume 1 — The Argument in Brief* — the full case in one sitting, roughly ninety minutes
- *Volume 2 — How Paul's Letters Were Edited* — the complete textual evidence, every verse, every objection answered
- *Volume 3 — The Chain from Scripture to Sovereignty* — the chain from Paul to current constitutional law, each link as a primary source document
- *Companion A — The Verse-by-Verse Analysis* — every verse in Paul's letters, classified with grounds, signals, and confidence scores
- *Companion B — The Reconstructed Pauline Letters* — Paul's seven letters with the most evidenced additions removed

Or begin with Galatians in Companion B. It required the least reconstruction of any Pauline letter. It is the clearest single expression of what Paul was arguing before the additions settled in. It begins, unusually, with no pleasantries.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. (Galatians 1:6–7)

The different gospel he is objecting to is the one that attached conditions. His gospel is the one without them.

This document is a self-contained introduction to the By What Authority series. Scholarly citations, full methodology, and verse-level evidence are in the full volumes.